No. 52

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF
WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

"Listen to me, Bob," she remarked very quietly. "When a girl of my social standing marries a man like you, she makes a tremendous sacrifice on the altar of love."

R. of M. G., No. 52.

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ALICE was sowing the seed of discontent into her sister's heart very skillfully. And she was doing it with a definite purpose in view. Had the unsuspecting Betty been able to discern the motive behind Alice's propaganda, she would at once have ceased discussing her intimate family affairs with her.

But as usual, Betty failed to realize the danger which threatened her. And what is more, she was beginning to coincide with Alice.

It was true enough that Bob did not ask her permission if he wanted to go out with some of his friends. He always took that privilege for granted.

Bob quite frequently went to little stag parties with the men who worked with him in the same garage.

"You wouldn't have to tell him if you fear that he'll raise a rumpus," Alice suggested shrewdly. "Just say that you are coming to Oak Manor with me for a few days."

The matter was discussed for quite a while, and finally Betty consented.

"I am glad," the older sister went on, obviously pleased. "Mr. Fredericks is one of the richest men in Chicago. And he is an old bachelor."

This statement did not make much of an impression upon Betty. She did not care particularly whether this Mr. Fredericks was a rich man or not.

She saw an opportunity to mingle with her own kind. Her secret longing for a fling amid social gayety was to be gratified at last.

That night she lied very convincingly to her husband. Save for a shake of the head he made no comment whatever.

"You—you don't mind, do you, dear?" she coaxed.

"I—I haven't any right to object to your staying

with your sister a few days," he told her a trifle gruffly. "Go ahead."

And Betty went.

The night of the party, arrayed in a wonderful creation of flimsy white silk material borrowed from her sister, Betty was easily the center of attraction.

The home of Mr. Fredericks had been decorated lavishly for the occasion. The large number of guests were for the most part men and women composed of members of the Madison Country Club.

This organization, known as Chicago's fast set, usually supplied the spice to the society columns.

Mr. Fredericks himself was a man of loose morals. Because of his immense wealth he held an exalted position in society. Rather past fifty, he carried himself like a man of thirty.

Although not handsome, he was always a pleasant sight to feminine eyes. He had the happy faculty of saying the right thing at the most opportune time.

His generosity was well known. And that was, perhaps, the only commendable trait about him.

A poor truck driver with a story of distress received a hearing and went away with a hundred dollar bill in his pocket. That was the policy he adopted in his business.

If a pretty young stenographer asked for a two dollar raise he gave her ten, providing she allowed him to pinch her cheek and hold her hand.

It seemed that Mr. Fredericks was already well informed about Betty's private affairs when he found an opportunity to talk to her alone.

"I knew your father quite well, Mrs. Harding," he told her with a pleasant laugh. "So you are a Procter, eh? Well, I am indeed glad to see you here." As he uttered the last words he put a hand on Betty's shoulder

and looked deep into her eyes.

"I hope," he wen on, "I may have the pleasure of meeting your husband. I understand he is engaged in the automobile business. I am in need of a new car. Perhaps he would be kind enough to suggest what type of a car to buy."

Betty flushed. She was ashamed to pursue the subject. And she could not without admitting that Bob was only an ordinary automobile mechanic.

But conditions demanded that she speak frankly. Bob and this Mr. Frederick must never meet. There would be no end of trouble if her husband found out about her being at the party.

And in order to remove any such possibility, she said with a smile:

"I am afraid my husband's suggestion would not be of much value to you, Mr. Fredericks. He does not sell cars. He repairs them. He is a—a mechanic."

"Ah, I see." He paused a moment, his brow wrinkled. "I suppose he has ambitions, hasn't he? I am sure he doesn't want to stay at the work he is doing now. And if that is the case, I would enjoy giving him a lift.

"I'd do it for your sake, my dear Mrs. Harding. If conditions were reversed, I know your departed father would do the same for the husband of a daughter of mine."

Betty was not ready to give her answer.

"You — you are very kind, Mr. Fredericks," she said finally. "But I don't think my husband would accept your financial assistance. He is so thoroughly independent."

"A very commendable trait, my dear young woman," the multi-millionaire declared, stroking his chin. "Yes, a most commendable trait. Just the same I would like to see the daughter of an old friend elevated

to something better than an ordinary automobile mechanic's wife."

She stared at him, her lovely eyes widening.

"What do you mean?" she asked, faintly suspicious of him.

"You must not misunderstand me," Fredericks laughed softly. "I mean I could easily provide the capital which would make an automobile dealer out of your husband. With a little studying he may become a successful business man."

Betty met his prolonged gaze without flinching. There was kindness in it. She saw that at once.

During the short space of time neither spoke again, her imagination worked feverishly. It was nothing to boast of being referred to as an ordinary automobile mechanic's wife.

But being called the wife of a successful business man, was quite another thing.

Her father had been in busniess. So was Philip Gordon. Business had brought them wealth and social position.

Her husband was an unusually intelligent young man. But she doubted very much that he would accept financial help from a total stranger like Mr. Fredericks. A slight feeling of resentment crept into her heart.

"No, it is useless," she said half aloud. "Bob is so stubborn."

"Stubborn, is he?" Mr. Fredericks grinned. "Well, I should like to have a chance to talk to him nevertheless."

She turned to him with an expression of fright on her lovely face.

"I know where your husband is employed," he continued, watching Betty through the corners of his eyes. "There can be no harm in me going there to have

a chat. I may be able to——"

"No, you mustn't!" she interrupted him almost fiercely.

"Why not, Mrs. Harding? I am sure there can be nothing wrong in a man like me wanting to befriend a young——"

Again Betty interrupted.

"You see," she explained hastily, "my husband does not know that—that I came here with my sister tonight. If he found that out through you, he'd make it unpleasant for me. It is really the first time that—I deceived him."

Fredericks' smile was crooked. It was more like a leer.

It seemed to afford him a great deal of satisfaction to hear this wonderful young creature accusing herself of having deceived her husband.

It gave him a foothold—something to work on.

"You can trust me to protect you, my dear Mrs. Harding," he said with utmost gentleness. "This matter can be arranged without your husband finding out that you attended my party."

He took one of her hands in both of his, and pressed it.

"Look around you," he went on with that same tender note in his voice. "Is this home anything like yours? I dare say not. And yet, you were born to live in one like this. The Procters were always a proud race.

"I can not understand why you were permitted to lower ourself to the extent of marrying an ordinary automobile mechanic. And, please, don't misunderstand me when I say this. You were meant for something better."

The words struck home, and that instant Betty committed the first treason agains her husband.

Yes, she had lowered herself. She was forced to admit it. She had sacrificed position and friends for Bob Harding.

With provoking stubborness he had upon several occasions refused to elevate himself. And now the prospect of living for the rest of her life in a three room flat on a side street was not so alluring.

She had but to look around to see what riches meant to a woman.

"Yes, I suppose I made a mistake," she murmured. "But it is too late now."

"It is never too late," Fredericks assured her. "I have fully made up my mind to see if that husband of yours is really worthy of you. I want him to fully understand what he owes you.

"If he is any kind of a man, he'll listen to my proposal which I shall make without offending him. And if he won't listen, it will be a sure indication that he has no ambition and that he is not worthy of you."

This ended the conversation because Alice pounced upon them with a gay burst of laughter.

"What do you mean by monopolizing my sister?" she approached Mr. Fredericks in mock anger. "I want you to know that she is a respectable, married lady. Unhand her, villain, or I shall avenge her dishonor on the spot."

Betty blushed prettily and allowed Alice to lead her away. She did not see the peculiar glance Alice exchanged with the host.

During the balance of the evening Mr. Fredericks amply displayed his popularity. Men crowded about him, and the women fawned upon him.

One woman, very beautiful and wearing a stunning gown, seemed determined to have him all to herself. Betty experienced a strange emotion—resentment.

She tried to forget it in the whirl of the succeeding hours. She thoroughly enjoyed the splendid music and the dancing.

A few glasses of wine sipped between dances, and a cigarette smoked with evident relish, brought back to her the realization of her ill-advised marriage to a poor automobile mechanic.

Now and then her eyes wandered over to where Mr. Fredericks stood with that woman hanging on his arm.

Her face was very close to his, and her shrill laughter could be plainly heard.

Betty smiled with satisfaction as the multi-millionaire deliberately walked away from the woman and came over to where she stood with Alice.

"Having a good time?" he addressed Betty.

"Oh, splendid," she answered, her cheeks aflame.

"Well, this is your proper sphere, Mrs. Harding," he said softly. "You belong here."

By the time the guests began leaving, Betty was in a fine mood. And for the first time since her marriage to Bob Harding did she dread going home to her three room flat.

"What did Mr. Fredericks say to you, sis?" Alice inquired as they were being driven home in the closed car.

Betty repeated almost word for word.

Sometimes there was pain in her voice, and sometimes unconcealed longing. And as Alice listened a peculiar smile lingered persistently on her averted face.

It was the smile of a woman who has successfully laid the foundation for the undoing of the one she hates —her sister Betty.

"Tell me one thing, dear," she said, slanting a quick look at the young Mrs. Harding. "Do you like Mr.

Fredericks?"

Betty's answer came instantly.

"Of course, I like him, Alice. How could I help it? In some respects he reminds me of dad. He is kind and considerate. He is a friend worth having."

"Indeed, he is," the older sister agreed.

"I do hope Bob will be reasonable when Mr. Fredericks approaches him," Betty said after a pause. "It might mean a great deal to us. I would like to see my husband become an independent business man."

"So would I — for your sake," said Alice with a peculiar grin.

Chapter 169

ACQUITTED!

IN THE small seaboard town selected by her stepmother, Lillian Crawford continued to abide with Marie Desmond as her companion. The barrier which stood between them ever since the first hour they met had been broken down at last. Marie had succeeded in convincing the unhappy young girl that she was her friend and not her enemy.

The seed of suspicion did not grow, but gave way to a feeling of mutual confidence and friendship.

Six months Lillian had to wait before she could follow her own inclinations. Six long months lay between her and the man she loved so dearly. After that her stepmother had no longer the right to dictate to her.

But the length of time required before she became of age did not worry her very much at the present moment.

Her mind was occupied entirely with thoughts of him who languished in a prison cell awaiting trial for murder. Not a message of any kind had she ever received from Victor Talbot.

She wrote to him frequently and assured him of her belief in his innocence and undying faith.

She told him in pathetic terms, and with the tears splotching the paper before her, that she would wait for him forever.

Marie, for some reason, seemed disinclined to discuss the probability of Victor Talbot's fate.

She was afraid to, for the newspapers had already convicted the accused. So instead of slowly preparing

the young girl for the worst, she continued to keep the feeble flame of hope alive.

The former governess of the Gordon children was more fortunate so far as the activities of the postman was concerned.

Every week she received a letter from the faithful Annie containing all the latest news.

"The children are both well and as happy as can be expected," the girl wrote. "Of course, they ask for you a great deal, and want to know when you are coming back. Sometimes it is hard to answer their many questions. But I know God will bring you back where you belong. That is my daily prayer."

Marie tried to get what happiness she could out of these messages from her old home.

She, too, was praying every morning and every night that she may again be allowed to take Harry and Phyllis to her heart and tell them that she was their own mother.

In the meantime fate was preparing a surprise for those interested in the Hawkins' murder case. The specially impaneled jury was in possession of all the evidence, and the day for the trial was finally set.

That momentous day dawned at last. Slowly the faint gleam of the sun struggled through the heavy clouds.

It was a gloomy, dismal morning into which Victor Talbot's weary eyes peered through the bars of his cell in the Cook County jail. Before that same sun had set he would know his fate.

How he had been longing for this decisive day, and now, that it was here, he had no hope.

He would be convicted. The chain of evidence against him was only too complete. No man could doubt that he had committed the murder, and the penalty was

death.

The evidence showed it to be a premeditated deed and there were no ameliorating circumstances.

Perhaps — perhaps executive mercy would alter his sentence into imprisonment for life, but this was even more terrible than death.

The prisoner rested his head on his hand. His thoughts flew out into the freedom of his home.

Today he would see his faithful housekeeper, Mrs. Ruggles again, for she would surely be called to the witness stand.

How hard it would be for the good woman to give her testimony, and how she would weep to see her master on the prisoner's bench!

The autumn was near at hand; what were the woods like now? Soon the foliage would break out here and there into a riot of brilliant color.

How his eyes had feasted on this wonder of nature in happy times past! Now the trees in his orchards would bend beneath their weight of fruit.

The spring had promised a bountiful harvest. He yearned for his home out there in the beautiful country.

Last autumn he had brought out the poorest children in the village to garner the fruit. The solitary man had enjoyed their roistering and found pleasure in their ringing laughter and beaming faces.

He had sent them home richly laden and was rewarded by the satisfaction of bringing joy to so many little hearts.

Soon would come the storms of the fall of the year. How cozy he used to be in his study when often, deep into the morning, he sat at his books in clouds of smoke.

Restless ambition had urged him to constant study to widen his knowledge. His two hounds used to lay at his feet looking up at him from time to time in seeming

intelligence, as much as to say:

"Hear the wind howling outside? We are warm and comfortable here before the fire."

But now this was all lost. He was a dead man, for, either his hours were numbered, or he would spend the rest of his life in a living grave.

Oh why, in all this misery, did the image of Lillian Crawford rise in his mind? Lillian with her sweet loveliness? Did he not suffer enough?

Must longing for her and his lost happiness with her, add to his tortures? She, too, was lost to him, whether he died on the scaffold, or withered away in prison.

Ah! could he have but seen her once again and heard from her lips, "I believe in you Victor, I believe you are innocent, and I have never ceased to love you."

A pang of agony suddenly pierced his heart as his thoughts wandered on to the letter which her step-mother had shown him.

After all, was it so impossible for her to have found happiness again, elsewhere? Perhaps her wedding was being celebrated on the very day on which his life or death would be decided.

He sprang up in pain and anguish, like a deer which had been struck by the hunters and was being followed by the hounds.

"No, no," he said half aloud, as though to drown another voice, "I will not be robbed of my faith in her. It is the only ray of light in this gloom. Lillian has not forgotten me, she will love me even beyond the grave."

This comforted him. The confidence that Lillian had not turned from him, would give him strength and courage on the awful day which was before him.

Though judge and jury spoke him guilty, she knew him innocent, and his conscience was clear.

Time pressed onward. Crowds of morbid men and women filled the courtroom to witness the trial. The room was soon filled and many more were refused admittance.

The audience, representing almost all classes — men and women both, sat in expectancy, waiting to see the prisoner.

At last he was brought in.

Proud and unbowed and with a firm step, he walked to his bench. His glance passed lightly over the crowds, as though for him, it did not exist.

A pair of burning eyes fastened themselves upon him in particular—those of Mrs. Crawford. After many weeks, she at last saw him again—the man for whom her heart languished hopelessly.

She felt the blood surge to her face, and her hands clutched themselves convulsively in her efforts to control her emotion.

Why had he not entered into the plan of rescue which she had unfolded to him?

Instead of a prisoner, he would to-day be a free man, and with him she would go out into the world, happy.

But his heart clung in immovable faithfulness to a mere child; he preferred death to relinquishing her—his lover.

For all that, Mrs. Crawford worshipped him none the less. On the contrary, he seemed to her a hero in his strength of soul, and her passion for him grew, the more hopeless it became.

Once she had married an aging, unloved man, to win wealth and rank. With joy she would have sacrificed them now, could she but share her lot with this man, even in his misfortune.

Her soul was racked by the ordeal that stood be-

fore him. She trembled for him, for if he were convicted her life would be a void.

Victor had seated himself on the bench and was consulting with his attorney. The clerk of the court called for order.

Quiet and composed, Talbot listened to the reading of the accusation. But once did he glance aside and he met the eyes of Mrs. Crawford. He looked speakingly toward her.

The message they flashed him was sub-conscious; they told him plainer than words what was going on in her heart.

But he had not been seeking her. Was Lillian there—the object of all his thoughts and longing? No!

To the right and to the left of Mrs. Crawford, he saw nothing but strange faces. Lillian was not there. He did not know whether to rejoice or grieve.

On one hand he felt as though she must be near him on this day, as though this was her place. On the other hand, he said to himself that the strain was more than she could bear—it would be too much for her.

The witnesses were called and put under oath. There were but few.

They were the men and women who had witnessed the encounter that evening between Talbot and Roger Hawkins, and Mrs. Crawofrd's men who had found the body, and finally there were Talbot's own people.

Among them was Mrs. Ruggles. As she saw him, tears filled her eyes and she could barely give her testimony.

Talbot was greatly moved. It was good to know how much the old woman was attached to him. Every word she said showed the conviction of her master's innocence.

It was different with Warner. He felt as if he

were the cynosure of all attention and his testimony was as verbose as possible.

He testified that he had noticed Mr. Talbot was away all night, and that when he heard of the murder, he had formed his own opinions.

This was an unlooked-for blow for Victor. It was not the statement itself, but the manner in which Warner made it, from which it was plain that the latter held him to be the assassin.

It was a great shock. Talbot had done a great deal for the young fellow.

He had come to him, little more than a boy, almost in beggary, and had been kindly taken up and provided for.

Talbot had taken a personal interest in his welfare, and these were his thanks. It did not seem possible. Did Warner actually think him to be the murderer?

Could he, after the long time during which they had lived together, really hold him capable of such a deed?

For his attorney, Talbot had chosen Henry Clayton, a friend who was an associate of his earlier life.

It can readily be conceived that Talbot had placed his interests in the hands of a man who would work for them with all his soul.

Clayton's summing up was animated by the feeling that his was a righteous cause.

"Any man who, as I have, has associated with Victor Talbot from day to day, who has, as I have, observed him in many conditions, would realize the utter impossibility of his having committed this deed, even in anger. I can safely stake my own life on his innocence," he said with firm conviction.

"I grant that the prosecution is in possession of

strong evidence to the contrary but, gentlemen of the jury, I appeal to you to consider well if these seeming proofs are anything more than a combination of unfortunate circumstances."

Here the attorney seemed to censure every intelligence in the room for having had any preconviction about the prisoner's guilt, and he turned about and faced the jury.

There was a ringing challenge in his voice as he went on:

"Dare you assume the responsibility of condemning upon these circumstances a man who represents the highest type of manhood! It is not a life only that is at stake, it is not revenge for a life snatched from the busy world by a brutal hand that we should heed to-day.

"It is the awful responsibility of that thing we call State, which, having the power of life and death without gainsay or hindrance, should prove to the last inch of necessity its right to take a human life. It is this you have to consider, gentlemen." He paused a moment to take a long breath, then continued passionately:

"It is an unfortunate coincidence that Mr. Talbot engaged in words on that evening with Roger Hawkins. The weightiest evidence lies in the finding of the defendant's rifle near the dead man.

"But I ask yourselves gentlemen, and answer — would anyone who deliberately committed murder, leave the weapon of death behind as a clue to the author of the deed?

"The instinct of self-preservation is so strong, that even in moments of the greatest excitement, is it inconceivable hat the murderer, if he were the owner of the weapon, would have neglected the precaution of removing, and concealing it from the scene of the crime.

"The very fact of its presence shows conclusively

that the murderer intentionally placed it where it was found in order to cast suspicion on Victor Talbot. There is no doubt that the rifle was taken from Mr. Talbot's room for this purpose.

"Mrs. Ruggles heard the dogs at night and was roused by them. Had it been Mr. Talbot who had come for his weapon, the dogs would not have barked; they know their master. There is not a shadow of a doubt that it was a stranger who stole into the house and took the rifle.

"And then, gentlemen of the jury, have you never in your lives been in the fields or in the woods for hours without meeting a human soul? How is the defendant to show an alibi? The farm and woods are his home.

"From my past life with him, I know his habit of going into the open in times of mental agitation. Is this not the case with many of us? Is this a proof of his guilt?

"Victor Talbot has lived a noble and blameless life All who know him respect and honor him. His charity and public spirit have often been tried and have never been found wanting.

"It is a man of this stamp whom the prosecution accuses of a dastardly crime utterly foreign to his very being. Consider well if the seeming circumstances which cast a cloud over him, can justify an adverse verdict!

"And furthermore, gentlemen," he continued, "what motive could have caused Mr. Talbot to kill Roger Hawkins? It is not enough that he and the dead man had been heard quarreling.

"Men with quick tempers might quarrel over trivial things, but exasperation does not always end in bodily injury and the taking of life. Imprecations are not so uncommon that they can be taken as evidence of wilful murder.

"He had nothing to fear from Mr. Hawkins as a rival, for he himself was already the betrothed of Lillian Crawford.

"Never would she have consented to becoming the wife of Roger Hawkins. With heart and soul she clung to her betrothed and he knew that he could depend upon her faith.

"There was, therefore, nothing which Mr. Talbot had to fear, and, consequently, no reason or motive whatever can be advanced why he should have undertaken this deed.

"I pray heaven for power to communicate to you my confidence in his innocence. He is a man who, at the risk of his own life, has saved human lives; who has never refused aid where it was needed; who has shared his last morsel with his friends; who has dried many a tear of misery.

"This man cannot be a murderer!" he ended, his hands flung aloft in a last passionate appeal, and his voice raised to a shout. "Right and reason should bring conviction to every honest human mind. I pray God to show you the right!"

Deep silence followed this last simple appeal. Talbot sat leaning forward, his eyes shaded by his hand.

He was greatly touched by his friend's defense of him, but not only he, but the judge, jury and the public were not unmoved.

The inner conviction expressed in the lawyer's voice had held captive the emotions and the judgments of his hearers, and echoed in their hearts the feeling that such a man could not be a murderer.

Many of the women were in tears and as the attorney now bent over his friend on the prisoner's bench, laying his hand on his shoulder, and as Talbot took his hand in overflowing gratitude — sympathy for the de-

fendant grew stronger and stronger.

At last the momentous time had come—the jury withdrew for consideration. The tension in the court room had reached its height.

Mrs. Crawford was in a fever. Two dark red spots glowed on her cheeks. Her glance did not leave the prisoner who now sat looking down in expectancy?

Could he hope for acquittal? Was not the evidence against him too strong? His only hope was in the power of God to enlighten the jury.

His courage did not leave him. Though pale, he was composed.

"Lillian, pray for me," he thought in the hopelessness of his position, as if heaven would certainly give ear to her prayer.

The duration of the jury's consultation seemed an eternity. Drops of perspiration gathered on his brow. Never before had he clung so to life as now when it was threatened.

At last the end was near! The jury filed in. The dropping of a pin could have been heard in the intense silence with which the jury was received in the great court room.

Talbot could hardly see. Spots of light danced before his eyes. He was strained in every nerve. What was coming? What would the verdict be?

Now he heard as though from afar, the words, "Not guilty." Then after a pause he heard the judge:

"The defendant is acquitted for lack of evidence."

His emphasis showed that he considered the evidence very strong against the defendant, although it had not sufficed to convince the jurors of his guilt.

"Acquitted!" cried Mrs. Crawford to herself.

"Acquitted, Victor!" cried the attorney to his friend.

"Acquitted," murmured Talbot with a bitter smile, "for lack of evidence! Of what good is this acquittal to me? It does not remove the stain which rests upon me. In the eyes of the world I am and remain a murderer!"

"Victor, be reasonable; rejoice in your freedom," cried his friend heartily. "We have won time and we will employ it to discover the real murderer. Have faith, he will be found! Now you are free and we can work together."

Congratulations poured in from all sides. Many who had doubted him came to prove to him with their cordial implications that they had always had faith in his innocence.

These manifestations were received gravely by Talbot, but they could not make him forget his painful position. The brand of Cain, he felt, was on his brow, until the guilty man was found.

Only one happy thought flashed through his mind: he would now be able to look for Lillian, and when he found her, he would convince himself as to the strength of her belief in him and see with his own eyes whether her feelings were the same toward him.

There was one, however, who did not approach him to congratulate him on his freedom — Mrs. Crawford.

After the verdict had been given, she had disappeared from the court room, leaving no trace behind her. Victor had given her but a fleeting thought. He was glad that she had avoided a meeting with him which could only have been painful to them both.

The necessary formalities having been settled, Talbot left the court house in company with Lawyer Clayton, his friend.

In spite of everything he could say or do, the latter could not change the ill-humor or lighten Talbot's spirits.

He was keenly conscious of the fact that his acquittal did not fully clear him; that he had not received an honorable discharge, for, as Judge Lindsay had said, he was acquitted for lack of sufficient proof.

When at last the friends separated, Clayton grasped the other's hand:

"Hold up your head, Victor; you do not need my assurance that I will not lose track of this affair, and we will discover the perpetrator of the murder if he is the devil himself! Au revoir!"

OB HARDING was shrewd enough to notice the change in his lovely young wife. The change consisted mainly in Betty's renewed vivacity and obvious pleasure in living. There was not the least doubt in his mind but that the few days stay at Oak Manor had done her a world of good. But there was another side to this change which Bob failed to perceive at first.

The expression in her eyes, when they rested on him, was one which expressed speculation rather than a wife's love. An occasionally a slight frown furrowed her smooth brow.

One evening he returned home in somewhat of a hurry, and perhaps an hour earlier than usual. Betty, standing at the window, saw him coming, and a peculiar smile curled her lips.

She greeted him affectionately as he strode into the dining room where the meal cooked by herself waited.

"What do you think, Betty," he blurted out the moment he was seated. "Some swell by the name of Fredericks called at the garage to-day and asked for me. He wanted me to look over his Rolls-Royce. I never saw a man more friendly."

"Is that so," was her only comment.

"Yes, and that is not all," he went on somewhat excitedly. "After I had finished the job he complimented me on my works. He asked me a number of questions and finally wound up by offering to finance me if I cared to go into the automobile selling business."

"How strange," said Betty innocently. "I suppose your skill and your personality made a favorable impression on this Mr. Fredericks."

"I suppose so," came back quickly. "And I frankly like the man, but this thing looks fishy to me."

"Why, Bob?"

"Because I know that such things don't happen in real life, Betty. Why should an absolute stranger suddenly take such an interest in me? And do you know that it would take at least twenty-five thousand dollars to start in the selling game?"

"Yes," replied Betty, "I know that. Rich men often do such things. They get funny notions about helping some worthy, ambitious young man up the ladder. Mr. Fredericks might be just such a man. What are you going to do about it?"

Harding shook his head, puzzled.

"Darned if I know," he said. "I don't like the idea of putting myself under obligations to anyone. Your dad and Phil Gordon once offered to help me. I turned them down because——"

"Because of your foolish pride," his young wife finished with a great deal of spirit. "I wonder sometimes, dear," she added as she ran around the table and sat on the arm of his chair, "if such a thing can't be carried to extremes.

"Pride is alright. I admire it in a man. I really don't like the idea of you working in a garage as an ordinary mechanic all your life. There is no reason in the world why you should."

As Bob lifted his eyes to meet those of his wife, there was a hurt look in them.

Never before had she expressed herself in this manner.

"I—I have no such intentions," he declared, his voice a trifle unsteady. "Before we settled down in this flat I had enough money to start a shop of my own. In a few years I would have had enough to buy a few cars of a good make and sell them.

"But all of the dough I saved went for furniture

and things. You had some rather extravagant ideas as how a home for us should be fixed up. Now you know you did, Betty," he added apologetically when he saw her flush up.

"Guilty!" she confessed without rancor. "I wanted a home into which I could invite my friends without feeling ashamed."

The last word stung Bob to the quick.

"Ashamed, eh?" he repeated. "I suppose you are also ashamed then of being the wife of a poor automobile mechanic. Is that true? Answer me!"

Betty looked at him startled. She did not like her husband's attitude nor the harshness in his voice. There was never a time in her life when she was afraid to admit a truth.

"Listen to me, Bob," she remarked very quietly. "When a girl of my social standing marries a man like you, she makes a tremendous sacrifice on the altar of love. That is exactly what I have done.

"Now, please, don't misunderstand me. I am not sorry. You have done your best in trying to provide a nice home for me. I appreciate that.

"But," she went on, meeting his surprised gaze squarely, "I have every right to pull you up to my level. I don't expect to stay on a side street and in a three room flat forever.

"I have several times suggested accepting a loan from Phil Gordon——"

"So you have," Bob broke in with some vehemence, "and I vetoed those suggestions. The day will never come when people can say that my rich brother-in-law or any other rich man put me where I am."

Betty saw that her husband's anger was aroused. She saw also that it would be worse than useless to continue the argument.

And she was not able to fight down the feeling of resentment which rose within her. She did not finish her evening meal, but rose and left the room.

For a while Bob Harding remained alone and ate in silence. But the food had lost its flavor. Finally he leaned back, threw down the fork and began to think.

Cool reasoning told him that Betty had indeed made a sacrifice when she married him secretly.

From the pampered, college-bred daughter of a rich aristocrat she had come down to the level of a poor automobile mechanic's wife. Conditions had been against them at the start, that was true.

But he had never made an effort to see Betty's side of life.

As he rose slowly and went into the adjoining living room, he found Betty seated at the window, daubing her face with a handkerchief.

The sight of her in tears quickly aroused that same old tender feeling for her.

With a few hurried steps he was at her side, and placed an arm very tenderly about her shoulder.

"I guess I have been a fool, dear," he said in a soft tone. "That man Fredericks is coming back to the garage to-morrow. If you still want me to, I'll take him up on his proposition. But," he added, every word costing him an effort, "I'll do it because of you."

Betty gave him a smile so sweet, and so filled with gratitude, that he dropped on his knees and buried his head in her lap.

"I know I am not half good enough for you, sweetheart," he confessed. "And from now on I'll try to be the man you want me to be. As soon as I have accumulated enough money to move into a better flat in the suburbs, we'll do it. Never again will you be ashamed of your home—and me."

She crooned over him softly as she fingered his curly dark head.

"Why, I have never really been ashamed of you, dear boy," she told him. "But I always wanted to help you, and you wouldn't let me."

"Oh, I'll let you help me now alright," Bob cried, rising and folding Betty in his strong arms. "And I want you to meet Mr. Fredericks as soon as we have formed this partnership of ours. To all appearances he is one of the finest men in the world."

It was perhaps a good thing that Bob Harding could not see his lovely young wife's smile.

That night the automobile mechanic lay awake nearly until morning making and unmaking plans.

He could not understand why a rich man like this Mr. Fredericks should want to befriend him to the extent of financing a business like that of buying and selling motor cars.

Little did he dream that his own Betty was the one who had given the idea impetus through her youthful beauty.

Neither had he the faintest inkling what sort of a man Fredericks was, and who really was at the bottom of it all.

Not for a moment did he connect his wife's sister with the matter. Alice Gordon had shown too plainly her dislike for him.

When he went to the garage the next morning his mind had been made up. About eleven o'clock Mr. Fredericks paid him the second visit.

As Bob Harding was ready to accept the proposition, no persuasive arguments were needed.

The plan formulated between them was that Bob Harding would run the business with Mr. Fredericks as a silent partner and the financial backbone.

The profits were to be divided share and share alike, with the proviso that Harding had the privilege of paying off his benefactor in annual installments and thus gain sole control.

Bob accompanied Mr. Fredericks to the bank where the sum of twenty-five dollars was placed to his credit.

Swelling with pride and importance, the young automobile mechanic rushed home.

"It is all fixed, Betty!" he cried as his wife came forward to meet him. "In a week from now I'll be in business for myself."

"Where are you going to locate?" she inquired.

"On Michigan Boulevard," he replied promptly. "I know a man who wants to sell out. I happened to think of him last night in bed. This is a fine chance, and I'll work my head off to make good."

"You'll make good alright," Betty encouraged. "And whatever you do, try not to offend Mr. Fredericks. Remember that he is your best friend."

"You bet he is," Bob agreed heartily. "And he is white clean through."

Poor, trusting Bob. If he only could have known what the future held in store for him.

In less than week he was established in his new venture. The last formality was that of signing an agreement with Mr. Fredericks.

It had been worded with utmost shrewdness, and the lawyer who drew up the document obviously had only his rich client's interest at heart.

It stated that in case of bankruptcy or trouble of any sort, all the fixtures and stock on hand was to go to Mr. Fredericks.

That was fair enough as Harding saw it. His benefactor deserved it because he took all the chances

with his money.

In the meantime Betty was in constant touch with Mr. Fredericks. She was too grateful to refuse to have lunch with him occasionally in a fashionable restaurant.

On two occasions they met Betty's sister. There was something about Alice's attitude that was puzzling. She appeared to be on terms of closest friendship with the multi-millionaire.

There were furtive glances between them which the unsuspecting Betty failed to notice.

A few days later Mr. Fredericks invited the two sisters to a dinner to be given in his luxurious home.

Alice accepted readily, while Betty was reluctant. They discussed the matter over the telephone.

"Why don't you want to go, sis?" Alice wanted to know.

"I have never been away from home alone at night," Betty said. "I am afraid Bob would object if I would——"

"Nonsense," interrupted the older sister. "What right has he to object? It it wasn't for Mr. Fredericks he would still be working in a garage as an ordinary mechanic. And you don't have to tell him where you are going do you? Just say you are going with me."

Betty pondered for quite a while. Finally she assented.

"I am glad you are game," was Alice's comment, then hung up the receiver.

The Fredericks Dinner was to take place the following night. In another telephone conversation between the two sisters they agreed to meet at the multi-millionaire's mansion at six o'clock.

Betty figured that she would be able to return to her own modest flat before her husband got home. Business always kept him until nine, and sometimes later.

Mr. Fredericks was laying his plans with the cunning of a man who is used to dealing with women. And in this he had the assistance of Alice.

But there was a tremendous surprise in store for him. He had not the slightest idea why Mrs. Gordon was so anxious to throw her lovely young sister at his head.

It was true that Betty's youthful loveliness had inflamed this man of much wealth and little morals.

And when he proposed to help her husband he fully expected to be paid. For one thing he had something on Betty. She had come to his party without the knowledge of her husband.

She would not dare betray that she came to his home to eat dinner with him. This gave him an advantage which he proposed to make the best of.

At the appointed hour Betty arrived. She was ushered into the reception room by a suave Jap valet.

She had scarcely been seated when the host came downstairs.

"Ah, I am glad to see you, my dear Mrs. Harding," he exclaimed, looking her over appraisingly. "You are making me very happy."

Betty blushed to the roots of her bobbed hair.

"I—I hope my sister will come soon," she faltered.

"Oh, she'll be here in a little while," Fredericks told her. "Let me help you with your wraps and make yourself at home. Pardon me for a moment. I want to see if everything is ready."

The multi-millionaire engaged in a whispered conversation with the Jap valet in the closed dining room on the other side of the hall.

"Are you sure all the servants have gone, Toto?" he inquired anxiously.

"Yes, sir, they are gone, sir," the valet answered in a guarded tone and with a sly wink. "You will not be

disturbed sir, for the rest of the night."

"Alright, Toto. That is what I want. As soon as the dinner is over, you go upstairs to your room and stay there. No matter what happens, you are deaf, blind and dumb. Understand?"

"Perfectly, sir."

Chapter 171

"I AM INNOCENT!"

BOB HARDING made amazing progress considering the short time he was in business. Not a day passed without selling at least one car and sometimes two. For this he was indebted to his silent partner, for Mr. Fredericks had the influence and the right power of persuasion.

To-day Bob was in a particular good mood. In looking over his account he discovered, that, if nothing unforeseen happened, he would be independent in two years. His enthusiasm soared.

Already he was making plans to take an apartment in a more desirable section of the city. He wanted a home his Betty need not be ashamed of. But that was not all.

He meant to improve his deportment and his manner of speech. He wanted to become his wife's equal intellectually.

Continued in next number

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were his continual thoughts. Under the impulse of this inspiration he informed the chief of the magical power of these cards, which in possession of an enemy would cause dire disaster to his family as well as himself. Thoroughly frightened the chief gave this treasure to Korn and escorted him to the seacoast far from his place of captivity. After various wanderings and adventures he arrived at the German colony Kameron, where he secured a position on board a Hamburg merchant ship; and through these events we became possessed of the *Genuine Cards*, the handwritten interpretation and instructions how to use them.

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